

April 16, 2026

Honoring clients in stuttering therapy: Building the therapeutic alliance through co-design and collaboration



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Starting off with disclosures:



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

**Not just disclosures...
gratitude, as well!**

Disclosures (About / Gratitude):

- Father
- Husband
- Clinician
- Professor
- Researcher



Thank You

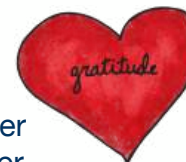


**MDXR
LAB**

@mdxrlab

Disclosures (About / Gratitude):

- Student
- Musician
- Nerd
- Son, brother
- Animal lover



Thank You



Disclosures (About / Gratitude):

CAMP SHOUT OUT

- Leadership Team

Thank You



<https://www.campshoutout.org/>

Disclosures (Honorarium):

Thank You

NEW JERSEY NLSHA
Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Will be donated to:

CAMP SHOUT OUT
Building Communicators for Life



<https://www.campshoutout.org/>

Today's hour and a half timeline:

- **Hear** some ideas.
- **See** some examples.
- **Listen** to our reflections.
- **Talk** to and with us (and each other).



And some time for Q/A!

**Therapy works best
when it's built with
clients.**



How WE operate:

- Therapy works best when it's built *together*. Not when therapy is done to someone, but when it's created with *each other*.

The Working Alliance

- The degree to which the therapy dyad is engaged in collaborative, purposeful work (Sønsterud et al., 2019).



Research Report

The working alliance in stuttering treatment: a neglected variable?

Hilda Sønsterud^{†‡}, Melanie Kirmess^{§¶}, Kirsten Howells^{||}, David Ward[#], Kristin Billaud Feragen^{**} and Margrethe Seeger Halvorsen[†]

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[‡]Statped, Department of Speech and Language Disorders, Oslo, Norway

[§]Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

[¶]Sunnaas Rehabilitation Hospital, Norway

^{||}Independent scholar, Wilmslow, UK

[#]University of Reading, Speech Research Laboratory, Reading, UK

^{**}Oslo University Hospital, Centre for Rare Disorders, Oslo, Norway

(Received June 2018; accepted February 2019)

Three great points; WE can focus on...

Bond

Goals

Tasks

★ SLP-Driven Model

SLP → chooses activities → client participates

★ Co-Design Model

SLP + Client → design activities together

Introducing the “template” -

How might we be able
to combine
[something you love]
with therapy?

Great moments of back and forth:

Eventually, **WE** come up with the
idea to draw a picture.

**In particular, to draw
out an analogy of how
stuttering may affect
one’s life, over time.**

Thinking about goals...

LONG-TERM

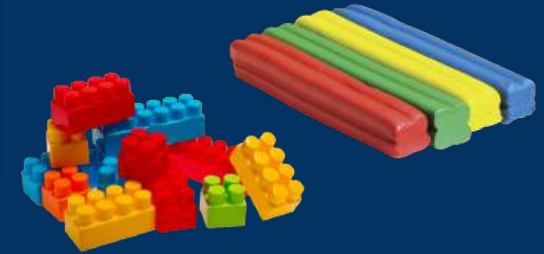
Student will demonstrate increased understanding of stuttering and will express personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to their own stuttering across structured and unstructured activities.

Thinking about goals...

SHORT-TERM

Student will create and explain a personal representation of stuttering (e.g., drawing, visual, analogy) and share at least 2 thoughts or feelings connected to their own experience with stuttering, with clinician support as needed, in 3 out of 4 opportunities.

“(e.g., drawing, visual, analogy)”



Truly individualized, and a nod to the arts!

Again, the “template” -

How might we be able
to combine
[something you love]
with therapy?

Great moments of back and forth:

- Erik: *Why do you like the saxophone?*
 - Benny:



Great moments of back and forth:

- Why do you like the saxophone?
- Erik: ***What does it take to learn it?***
 - Benny:



Great moments of back and forth:

- Why do you like the saxophone?
- What does it take to learn it?
- Erik: ***How might some of this connect to communication and/or stuttering?*** >>>>

Great moments of back and forth:

- Breath
- Timing
- Confidence
- And more!

Thinking about goals...

SHORT-TERM

Student will explore and describe at least 2 similarities between playing a musical instrument (e.g., saxophone) and using their own voice for communication, with clinician support as needed, in 3 out of 4 opportunities.

How I operate - I think a lot about:

- What does it mean to be culturally responsive, as a clinician?



Free culturally responsive course from ASHA:

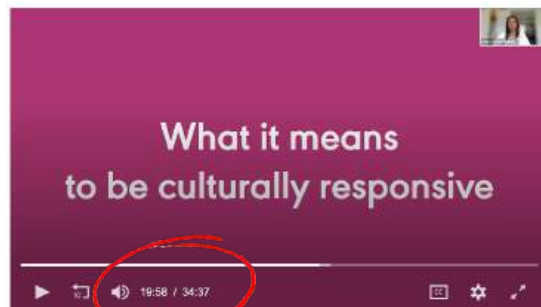
Redefining the Work: Passion, People, and Perspective



REDEFINING THE WORK: PASSION, PEOPLE, AND PERSPECTIVE

<https://www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/redefining-the-work-course/>

At around the 19:58 mark...



“Really taking the time to respond to the variables that are a part of someone’s culture.”

<https://www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/redefining-the-work-course/>

Back to the “template” -

How might we be able to combine
[something you love]
with therapy?

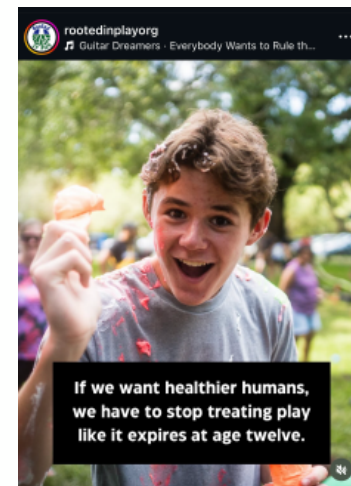
Expanding the “template” -

Honoring clients in stuttering therapy:
Building the therapeutic alliance
through **co-design** and **collaboration**

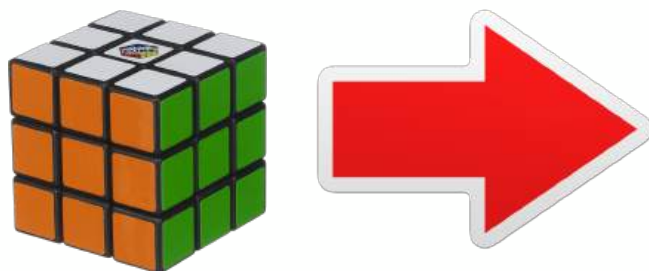
How am I “honoring” my client? Am I
“co-designing” and “collaborating” with
my client?

I recently saw
this post on
Instagram.

I think it connects
to the Rubik’s
Cube (and more!).



So, we play.

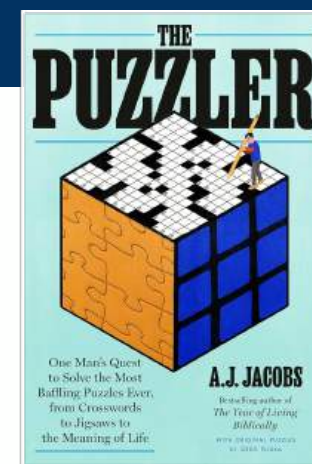


As we play, I recall...

“A good metaphor makes
the strange, familiar” (p. 196).

**Sometimes stuttering
can feel strange.**

ME: “So, we play!”



What's happening?

- **Play** unfolds.
- Benny **teaches** me.
- I'm **learning** from Benny.
- And then... an **idea**...

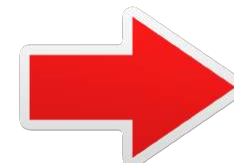


An example from last summer...

Presenting the Rubik's Cube to an audience?

The talent show!

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Might we have a therapeutic opportunity?

Thinking about goals...

SHORT-TERM

Student will use a powerful voice and confident body presence (e.g., posture, eye contact, gestures) to introduce a brief performance activity (e.g., presenting a Rubik's Cube challenge skit) and share their message with an audience, with clinician support as needed, in 3 out of 4 opportunities.

Before we see the video...

- Confident **body presence** (e.g., posture, eye contact, gestures)...
- Awareness of your **body**



We can co-create a communication plan that includes the body.

Reflecting with Benny:

- “What was that experience like for you up there?”
- “What were you thinking right before you started?”
- “What helped you get through the skit?”



Beyond the skit... the “real world”...

Stuttering is more than just behaviors...

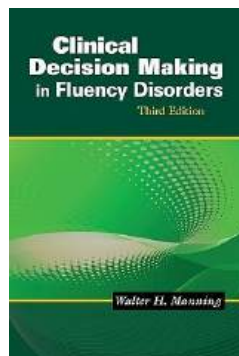
- Stuttering is a multidimensional experience.
- ABC's of stuttering
 - Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive
- Adverse thoughts and feelings.
 - Let's look at the following direct quotes from published literature...

Affective/cognitive examples:

1

“[My experience with stuttering] is like I am a butterfly trying to fly, but I am constantly buffered by strong winds. I cannot move forward like I want and it is frustrating.”

(Manning, 2006, p. 155)



Affective/cognitive examples:

2



Journal of
**FLUENCY
DISORDERS**

“[The moment of stuttering is like] a momentary suffocation... you get the feeling that you're drowning.”

(Plexico et al., 2009, p. 94)

Affective/cognitive examples:

3

[stuck in] "...a black hole where time stands still until the word(s) get verbalized ."

(Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019, p. 4360)



Perhaps, play...

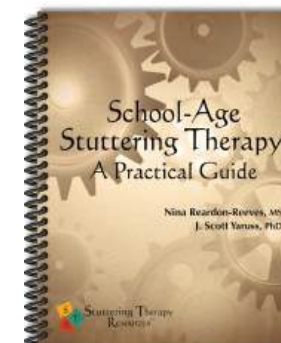


Perhaps, the co-design approach...



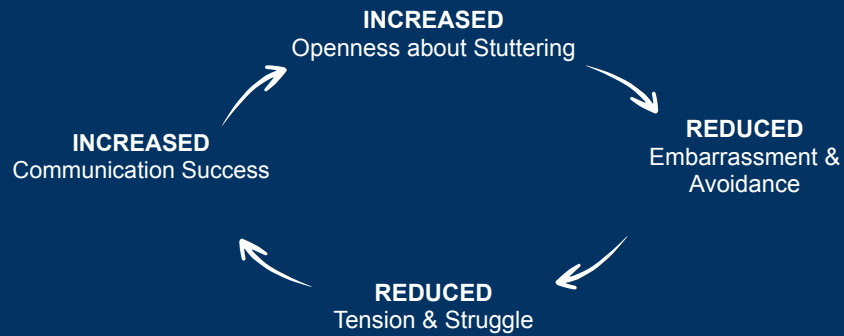
Creating optimal therapeutic environments:

- A practical guide that gives actionable steps that coincide with co-design and collaboration.
 - Amazing worksheets
 - Lots of activities
- In particular, I appreciate this following figure...

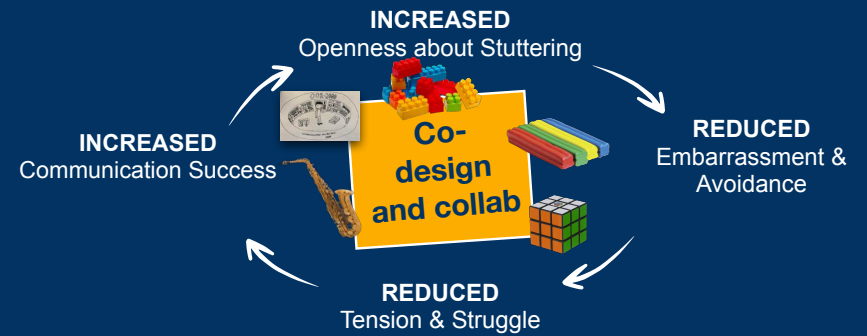


(Reardon-Reeves & Yaruss, 2013)

Creating environments where...



My adaptation... what's in the center?



What about...



A stand-up comedy routine?

- This idea creates an:
 - **Open space to explore stuttering:** Using humor to reflect on and express experiences with stuttering in a safe and empowering way.



Stuttering Edition

Unlimited possibilities...

- Comedy club in your speech room?
- Speech showcase, of sorts?
- Morning announcements?
- National Speech-Language-Hearing Month (MAY!)



MONMOUTH
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SPEECH-LANGUAGE
PATHOLOGY

Thank you!

MDXR LAB

<https://www.mdxrlab.com/>



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